

1 The Rural Education Access Programme

The Rural Access Programme (REAP) was established in 2001 following in the footsteps of two Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference bursary programmes. It assists academically able learners from poor rural communities in South Africa access tertiary education. Matriculants from these communities are usually unable to access Higher Education due to poverty, poor education, under-resourced schooling, lack of information, distance from urban centres or educational hubs, and the historical discrimination of apartheid.

REAP meets this essential need in South Africa by carefully selecting rural learners who meet university requirements. A package of support is provided to give them the best chance of success. Through education young men and women can escape poverty and uplift their families. Without support many of these learners are denied the opportunity of fulfilling their potential and changing their life circumstances.

REAP is not a bursary scheme. It calls on state mechanisms to assist poor students and provides add on value. Students are assisted through:

- Access to a subsidized state student loan
- A small grant for books, equipment, travel and living expenses
- A programme of workshops designed to develop social and academic skills
- Counselling and advice to motivate, sustain & overcome obstacles
- Performance monitoring and feedback

REAP currently has over four hundred students on the Programme, drawn from all corners of South Africa, studying a variety of undergraduate degrees or national diplomas at state universities.

2 Background

Over the last two years, REAP has explored ways of monitoring the impact of its support to students in higher education. This culminated, in 2004, in the piloting of a long-term tracking project of students who had left the programme.

During the organisation's annual strategic planning in 2005, a number of questions emerged from the staff group. Are we going in the right direction and how would we know if we were? Are we making a significant difference to the graduation rate? Why were some students dropping out? What happened to the students who disappeared from our programme? Funders have addressed a similar set of questions to REAP. When the Department of Education (DoE) published results of a cohort study, tracking 120 000 students who entered higher education in 2000, it became clear that the environment was ripe to take the tracking project a step further.

REAP therefore decided to track the 2002 intake group of 153 students, in parallel to the ongoing tracking project. The value of tracking this group is that:

- It represents the first full intake onto the REAP programme, following a pilot in 2001;
- The first group of graduates from this group would have completed in 2004; and
- Much of the information on this group had already been collected.

The purpose¹ of tracking the 2002 cohort was therefore to generate information about students: how many had graduated, were continuing to study, or had dropped out, and hence to identify key predictors of 'success' so that these could be fed into the REAP programme design, particularly the

¹This purpose was agreed at a staff workshop in September 2005

student recruitment process. REAP would also have data to compare with general tertiary student performance.

3 Context

REAP works at the intersection of three areas of South African life which attract substantial debate, school education, higher education and employment. All three are vaunted as key determinants of economic growth.

Van den Berg writes that “the overall performance of South African (school) students is near the worst in the world in the important areas of numeracy and mathematics, and is not much better in others”. He notes that significant shifts in the allocation of resources and deployment of teachers have not had the expected impact on academic performance at schools. Comparing Grade 6 reading comprehension and mathematic performance with ten other Southern African countries, South Africa attained the third lowest results, despite higher per capita expenditure than any of the other countries². Matric³ results continue to reflect historical disadvantage, with African students at former DET (Department of Education and Training) schools faring worst. In 2003, 11.4% of this subgroup gained matric endorsement⁴ compared to 51.7% of their white counterparts.

Equity efforts by government are challenged in rural areas, which struggle to attract and retain teachers with strong qualifications and experience. Poverty in the surrounding community also means that school fees are kept to a minimum which limits opportunities to supplement government subsidies. Van den Berg writes that “good administration, improved management and quality teachers which appear the most important requirements for reducing inefficiencies in African schools, are even scarcer than fiscal resources and more difficult to shift... Generally the pupils who have the greatest distance to catch up are in rural areas, where socio economic conditions – and the associated educational status of parents – are weakest and good teachers hardest to come by.” (ibid:32)

Minister of Education, Dr Naledi Pandor, in her 2005 Budget Vote speech, acknowledged the following:

“What has emerged from our research and our detailed consultations with higher education institutions is that universities and universities of technology are producing fewer graduates than they should, and that one of the main causes of this under-production is the high level of student drop-out. A cohort study undertaken of the 120 000 students entering higher education in 2000 suggests this. Apparently that cohort may not achieve an overall graduation rate of even 40%.”

The Department of Education is grappling with the combined impact of high enrolment at institutions of higher education, and slower progress than envisaged through these institutions. This creates a strain on affordability of higher education, with mounting evidence that students are not gaining qualifications in the numbers hoped.

Turning to the labour market, it is clear that higher levels of education increase employment prospects. Only 8% of South African men with a degree / diploma are unemployed, while 13% of women with the same educational status are unemployed⁵. However, the picture is more complex for young African

²From: Department of Education report, 2003: “Report to the Minister: Review of the financing, resourcing and costs of education in public schools”

³An abbreviation of matriculation, commonly used in SA for the school leaving examinations – Senior Certificate.

⁴Qualifying for university entrance

⁵Labour Force Survey, February 2002. Analysis provided by Debbie Budlender, 2004, using the 'narrow' definition of unemployment (i.e. Those who did not work in the past seven days, but wanted to work, actively looked for work, and would have been available to start work within a week)

men and women. In 2002, 48% of Africans in their twenties who have a degree or diploma⁶ were unemployed (a small improvement on 59% unemployment rate for those with a matric only) compared with 3% unemployment among white graduates in the same age category. This has since improved, according to the latest Labour Force Survey (March 2005) to a rate of 34% unemployment among African diplomates or degree graduates in their twenties.

While there is no unemployment among white and coloured scientists, 4% of African scientists are currently unemployed in South Africa⁷.

4 Methodology

Information gathered for this tracking exercise was sourced from REAP records and from the 29 institutions attended by the 2002 cohort of students. REAP maintains a database of all students who have received support, and this tracking study indicated additional data to be captured in future. The student advisors filled in some of the gaps from their own notes and from information about former students passed on by current students. Questionnaires completed by former REAP students as part of the tracking project provided some additional information.

Ideally, tracking should begin at the onset of a programme; it is difficult to fill in the gaps retrospectively. In this instance, we have information about each of the students when they began their studies in 2002 and about all but 15 students in 2005. We have data on the academic activities of approximately 100 students during the intervening years.

Most of the institutions readily provided information about the current status of students, but some were struggling with the administrative challenges of mergers and did not respond to requests for information. The status of 15 students out of the full group of 153 is unknown for this reason. We were particularly dependent on the universities and universities of technology (formerly known as technikons) to supplement data in instances where the student had already left REAP, but had continued to study. We asked institutions to provide information about the status of the students through each year since intake (whether they were still studying, had withdrawn, or had completed their studies), and whether they had received alternative funding (loan, or bursary, or both).

We also asked institutions to speculate whether students who were still studying in 2005 were “likely to graduate” at the end of the year. This information was based on an assessment of outstanding course credits and mid-year results of each student, and is subject to correction once the end-of-year exams have been completed.

Some of the limitations we encountered in the data-gathering phase include:

- Very busy staff at financial aid bureaus (FAB) of each institution. The responses they provided were valuable, but this necessitated several follow-up calls to each institutions to remind overloaded staff about our request for information;
- The FAB’s at some institutions were not able to tell us whether the student was likely to graduate, and referred us to each faculty offices, which was time-consuming; and
- A few institutions did not give us any feedback, despite several efforts to contact them.

5 Findings

5.1 Profile of the 2002 cohort

61% of the cohort comprised women, with African women making up 46% of the total group of 153 students. National research by the DoE shows that African women had the “largest share of head

⁶ A diploma in this instance ranges from a six-month qualification to a full qualification earned at a technikon.

⁷ This statistic featured in an interview with Minister of Science and Technology, Mosibudi Mangena, on SAfm radio show AM Live, October 2005

count student enrolments in 2003”, at 33%.

REAP selected matriculants from 7 provinces – i.e. Gauteng and Mpumalanga were not included. The Eastern Cape topped the list with 51 candidates (one third of the full number). This is notable in the context of research showing that the Eastern Cape produces the lowest matric pass rate in the country for matric-aged youth⁸ (van den Berg, 2004:36). The 39 Coloured students in the group hailed from three provinces: Western Cape (22), Northern Cape (10) and Eastern Cape (7). The remainder of the group was African (114, or 75%).

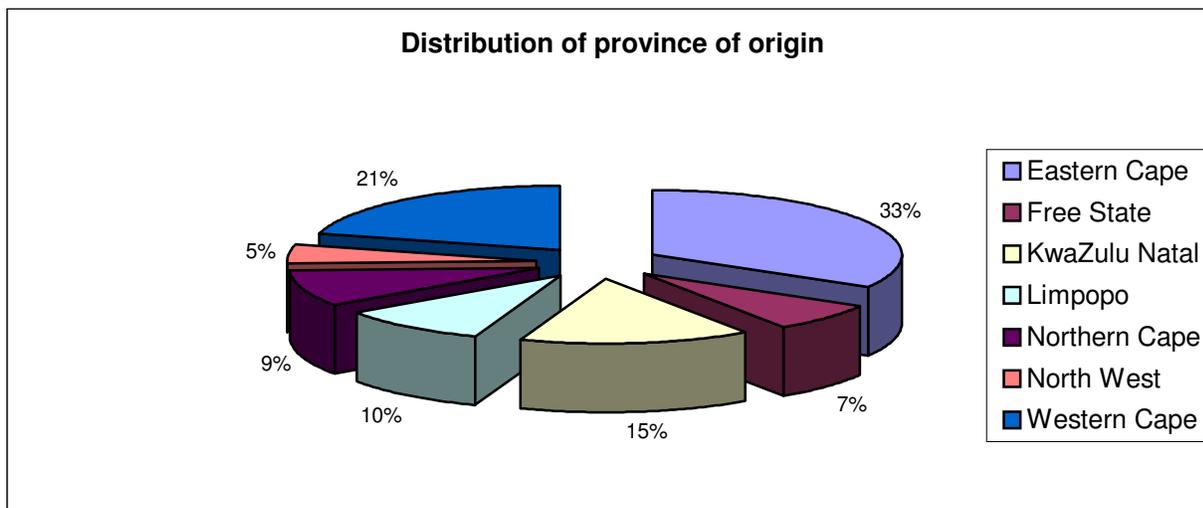


Chart 1: Distribution of 2002 intake, by province

63% of the students had been recruited through the standard REAP procedures, while a trial of recruiting through the institutions accounted for the remaining 37%.

Matric results were recorded for all but two students. We looked at Maths and English matric results for the purpose of this study. Only 7% of the students had passed maths HG (higher grade) and 29% scored maths results sufficient to meet minimum entry standards into natural sciences, had this been their choice. 49% of the African students selected by REAP passed maths at HG or SG (standard grade) level. This compares with 12% of all African matric-aged students across the country in 2003 (van den Berg, 2004:39). 16 students or 10% of the REAP cohort took and passed English 1st language HG, five of whom also passed maths HG.

At tertiary level, the 2002 cohort studied a range of 47 different degree or diploma courses, at 29 institutions of higher education (this range has since narrowed by virtue of the merger process). The institutions with highest attendance were: the University of the Western Cape (UWC) at which 20% of the students registered, the Eastern Cape Technikon and Pentech, each accounting for 12%. Technikons⁹ drew slightly more of the students than universities; 52% compared with 48%. This mirrors the national trend – of the 120 000 students tracked by the Department of Education since 2000, 61 000 attended technikons and 59 000 attended universities.

Bachelor of Commerce and LLB degrees were the preferred courses, claiming 16% and 7% of the total intake group respectively. Five technikon students registered for civil engineering. Lack of civil engineers in South Africa is a topic of current debate, with some citing this as a reason for problems

⁸This included students who had dropped out of school, or were in a lower Grade

⁹The terminology of universities and technikons is used in this report, when referring to events in 2002 – i.e. Prior to the change of terminology

with delivery of housing and other infrastructure services at local government level.

Please see Appendix A for a full list of institutions and Appendix B for a full list of courses, as well as their expected (minimum) duration.

5.2 Academic progress

We have information on the progress of 138 (or 90%) of the total intake group. Of the group of 66 who are still studying¹⁰ in 2005, 54 are expected to graduate at the end of the year. One of the 66 is not eligible to graduate because he is doing a six-year MBChB and another will not graduate because he only returned in 2004 after an absence of two years. Nine others, all doing three or four year courses, do not have sufficient credits to graduate at this stage. In other words, of the students who are still studying and eligible to graduate, 84% are likely to do so.

Progress	Count	Percentage (out of 138)
Completed their studies at time of tracking (October 2005)	25	18%
Still studying coursework in 2005	60	44%
Doing in-service training in 2005	6	4%
Withdrew before completion of their studies	47	34%
Total	138	100%

Table 1: summary of academic progress

If all the students due to graduate at the end of 2005 manage to pass their exams, this will put the graduation rate of the 2002 cohort at 57%. If the remaining still-studying students complete their qualifications in the future, the graduation rate will be 66%.

The categories of 'still studying' and 'withdrew before completion' in the above table deserve further exploration. Firstly, students still studying in 2005 can be differentiated according to the duration of their course and whether they changed course, or suspended their studies, after initial registration in 2002. As can be seen below, 24 students completed their studies in the minimum time of three years out of 126 eligible to graduate at the end of 2004, thus constituting a 19% optimal success rate. REAP operates on the understanding that most students from rural schools and poor socio-economic status need one or two additional years in order to complete their studies at urban, tertiary institutions. NSFAS, the national loan provider, offers loans of up to two years after the minimum duration.

Description	Count	Still studying in 2005
Students doing 3-year courses	126	45
Students doing courses of longer duration	20	12
Students who changed course after initial registration	6	2
Student who returned after a period of absence	1	1
Total	153	60

Table 2: Breakdown of students still studying in 2005

¹⁰This includes 6 students who are doing in-service training to complete their qualification

We have less information about reasons why students withdrew from their studies when they had already left REAP. There is some conjecture involved. For example, if the reason a student left REAP is recorded as academic failure, this same reason is inferred if he/she also dropped out of the institution. In this way, we can account for 30 of the 47 students who withdrew before completion. It is worth noting that an additional 9 students who drifted away from contact with REAP (and were therefore not eligible for continued REAP support) also withdrew from their institutions.

Description	Count	Percentage (out of 138)
Academic failure	22	16%
Dropped out	7	5%
Withdrew for health reasons	1	1%
Reason unknown	17	12%
Total	47	34%

Table 3: Breakdown of students who withdrew from studies

Comparison with the DoE 2000 cohort provides a useful context for patterns of withdrawal. Based on the information we had from the institutions, we were able to track the year-by-year movement of 100 students. We know that another 10% of students from the cohort withdrew during their studies, but we don't at what stage they withdrew.

Description	DoE Cohort	REAP Cohort (out of 100)
Withdrew during / at end of first year of study	30%	12%
Withdrew during / at end of second year of study	11%	7%
Withdrew during / at end of third year of study	9%	5%
Total withdrawn in first three years	50%	24%

Table 4: Comparison of withdrawal patterns

In both cases, there is a relatively high fall-out during the course of the first year. Thereafter, the figures stabilise. However, it is clear that the students selected by REAP have significantly more staying power than their counterparts in the national survey. It is worth noting that one of the students who withdrew during their first year has since returned, and that a number of the other students expect to return if their present circumstances change.

A further two students in the REAP cohort have withdrawn during the course of 2005, one for reasons of academic failure, the other chose to withdraw because she felt she was not coping, despite REAP support.

On track!

Amanda started her studies at University of the Western Cape in 2002. At the end of 2005 she completed her BSc Physiotherapy in the minimum required time of 4 years. She came from Cofinvaba, a small town in the rural Eastern Cape. No one in her family had a tertiary education. She tells the story of how, although there was no clinic nearby, people knew how to make splints from wood for broken legs. Her community's local knowledge along with the absence of modern medical services set her on a path to a medical career. Initially she wished to study medicine but quickly found, through volunteer service, that she had no tolerance for blood and decided on physiotherapy, which she loves. During Amanda's time with REAP she quickly developed confidence. She was aware of the reality of her environment and very informed about HIV, enabling her to be assertive with peers in REAP HIV workshops. In her second year Amanda won the international Golden Key Award. This award recognizes the top achievers in their faculties. The award brought a small US dollar prize with which Amanda purchased a computer. Immediately on completion of her studies Amanda gained a place at the academic hospital in Pretoria where she will do her obligatory community service. Before the start of 2006 she had moved to flat in Pretoria. She wishes to focus on sport physiotherapy and sees the time spent at an academic hospital as a good opportunity to gain experience. Amanda knows where she is going. She has already proved that she has the capacity, determination and vision to achieve and contribute to her community. In September 2006 she will visit Holland as a guest of a foundation that supports women on the Rural Education Access Programme.

5.3 REAP support

21 (14%) of the students who started receiving support from REAP in their first year of study in 2002 graduated while still on the programme, in a minimum time of three years. In other words, 21 of the 25 students who completed in 2004 did so while still on the programme. Of the four who graduated after they had left the REAP programme, one left because of a bursary, two left to do in-service training, and one had previously lost contact with REAP in 2003.

34 (22%) of the students in the 2002 cohort are still on the programme in 2005. This group includes three students doing in-service training¹¹. The 33 about whom we have information from the institutions are all set to graduate at the end of this year.

8 students exited REAP in order to do in-service training. Of this group, two completed their qualifications in 2004 (as stated above) and a further six are expected to do so in 2005. Two have since withdrawn from their studies without completing and information about the remaining student was unavailable from the institution.

The students who left the programme before completing their studies, or for reasons other than pursuing in-service training, did so on the following grounds:

¹¹ In the minority of cases, students doing in-service training in order to complete their courses remain on the REAP programme. The majority leave the programme.

Description	Count	Percentage (out of full cohort)
Received a bursary	9	6%
Academic failure ¹²	24	16%
Student decided to withdraw from studies (range of reasons)	8	5%
Health reasons	2	1%
Failed to pass REAP's academic conditions for continued support	10	6%
Lost contact with REAP	26	17%
Lack of consultation with REAP about course change or financial needs	4	3%
Unknown reasons	7	5%
Total	90	59%

Table 5: Reasons for leaving REAP prior to gaining qualification

Viewed as a bar chart (see below), one can see that loss of contact and academic failure together accounted for 33% of the cohort leaving the REAP programme. Since the 2002 intake, REAP has had the opportunity to strengthen the systems which retain students and enhance academic success. This is exemplified by the fact that 89% of the students on the programme passed their mid-2005 exams. The tracking project should enable REAP to identify the impact of adjustments to the student support systems.

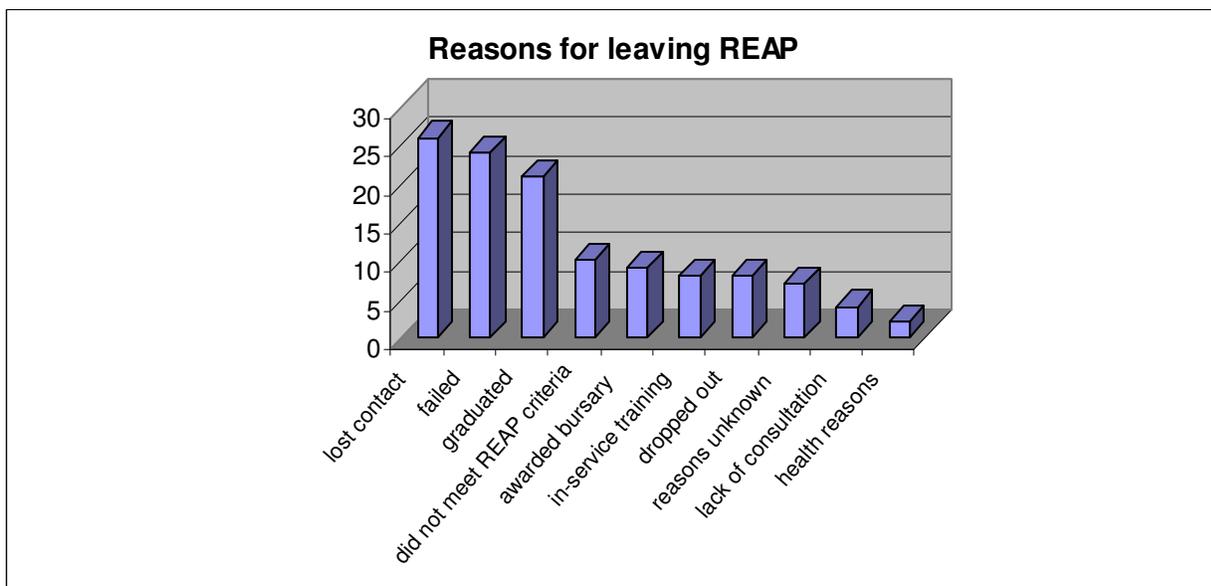


Chart 2: Reasons for leaving the REAP programme

Looking back at REAP records in the earlier years, it is difficult to differentiate between academic failure according to standards set by the institution and those set by REAP. In some cases, therefore,

¹² This sometimes, but not always, entailed exclusion by the institution

students who failed were allowed to continue by the institution, but no longer qualified for REAP support, whilst in other cases, the student was excluded from the institution on academic grounds. Systems have since been put in place at REAP to classify these separately.

Just over half of the students who are still studying continue to receive support from REAP (34 out of 66, or 52%). Most of the remaining students have accessed alternative financial support: Five are in receipt of bursaries, six have a bursary / loan combination and ten have loans only. Seven students have no alternative funding, while financial aid information was unavailable for seven continuing students. The information from the institutions show that at least two students who left REAP because they had been awarded bursaries did not retain those bursaries in future years.

5.4 Profiles of 'success' and 'failure'

Can REAP learn anything from the students who graduated in minimal time, and the students who did not complete their studies? The samples are too small to draw firm conclusions, but there are indications of success or failure that may be of interest to REAP.

Of the 24 students who completed their studies in 2004 (i.e. in minimal time), over two-thirds were from the Eastern Cape, when only one third of the entire intake group came from this province. Two-thirds were women, which is proportionate to their share of the full cohort. 83% were African (African students constituted 75% of the intake group).

The fact that African women and students from the Eastern Cape have been successful suggests validation of REAP's belief that marginalised rural youth can take advantage of educational opportunities with support and facilitated access.

14 were recruited through REAP as opposed to 10 recruited through the institutions, which slightly skews 'successful recruitment' in favour of the institutions, but this is not marked. This could be due to the fact that the primary criterion for selection by the institutions was academic record. Eight of the graduates studied at Eastern Cape Technikon, out of a total group of 18 at that institution. It will be useful to analyse this further, in light of speculation that the Technikon will be downgraded to a college of further education and training (FET).

We studied the results to see if there was a correlation between academic success (defined here as graduation within three years) at tertiary level and matric results. 14 of the 24 graduates had gained a matric exemption. Five had studied English 1st language HG. Interestingly, only one of the graduates had attained a pass in maths HG at school; he is doing post-graduate studies in 2005. 17 out of 24 had registered for their 'first choice' course. It is interesting to compare these variables in respect of the 47 students who withdrew from their studies prior to graduation – are there any patterns for REAP to consider when recruiting matriculants in future?

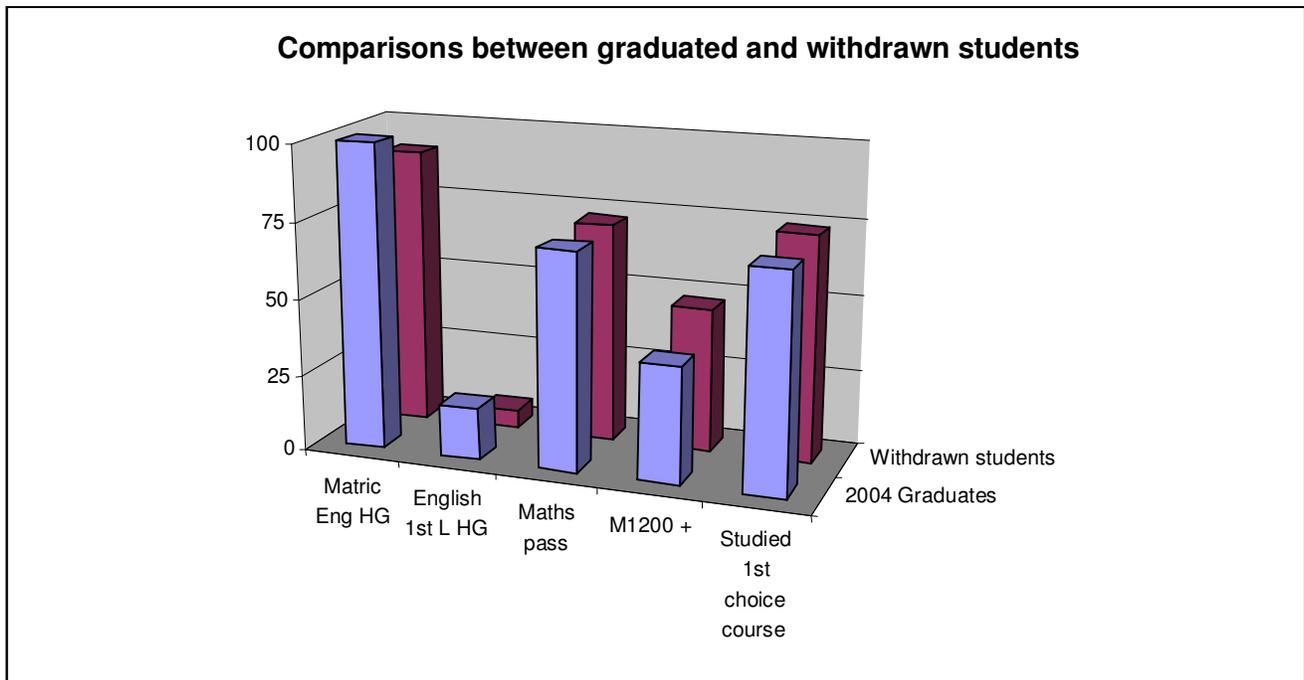


Chart 3: Comparing matric results of students who later graduated or withdrew from tertiary studies

The academic variables above do not show distinct patterns, suggesting that other factors should be considered. A scan of 14 questionnaires completed by members of the 2002 cohort (i.e. 12% of 119 students who have left the programme) shows the following:

Seven of the 14 are still studying in 2005; one at post-graduate level. Four of these students are funding their studies primarily through NSFAS loans, two of whom top this up with financial assistance of R300 to R350 per month from their families. The student doing post-graduate Commerce studies is in receipt of a full-cost bursary from Sun International (R28 000), while two students receive no formal financial aid. One explained that his father had made a personal bank loan in order to support him, while the second receives R300 per month from her family and an additional R200 per month from other people in her informal support structures.

The remaining seven students are no longer studying. One graduated at the end of 2004. It is unclear from the responses of a second student why he stopped studying, but REAP's records show that support was discontinued due to academic failure. Five students explained that they withdrew from their studies for financial reasons. Three of these students are currently in paid employment. One is working in a permanent, full-time government position, earning less than R2 500 per month. One is in full-time temporary job in the private sector, earning between R2500 and R4 500. One is doing casual work, receiving less than R500 per month. A fourth student is an unpaid volunteer with Lovelife.

Financial insecurity and academic failure sometimes co-exist as reasons for withdrawing from higher education, and it can be difficult to pinpoint the chief causal factor. Of the five students who cite financial reasons for leaving their studies, one failed to reapply to REAP for financial support, two did not qualify for further support for academic reasons, one drifted out of contact with REAP and the last student dropped out in his first year, while receiving REAP support.

6 Conclusion

It is always risky to draw conclusions from small samples and compare non-identical groups, yet the REAP staff team is encouraged by the findings reported above. It appears that students supported by REAP, even for a short while, have considerably better prospects of graduating than the general student body, albeit with extend periods of study. The two main factors influencing this enhanced result could be careful selection of students with drive and determination and the support programme. When the particular disadvantaged circumstances of students on the Programme are considered, compared to the range of advantaged and disadvantaged students making up the general Higher Education student population, the REAP student graduation rate could be even more significant.

These indicators give confidence in the value of a programme such as REAP in the present South African context. Continued monitoring and analysing of student performance will inform ongoing improvement and development of the Programme.

References

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Appendix A: Institutions attended by 2002 Cohort

Institution	Count
Border Technikon	6
Cape Technikon	2
D.I.T (Durban Institute of Technology)	1
Eastern Cape Technikon	18
Mangosotho Buthelezi Technikon	4
ML Sultan Technikon	2
University of KZN	2
Peninsula Technikon	18
Port Elizabeth Technikon	4
Technikon Pretoria	6
TNGAU	3
Technikon OFS	9
University of the North	2
University of the North West	1
University of Cape Town	2
University of Durban Westville	7
University of Fort Hare	1
UNATA	3
University of Transkei	1
University of the Orange Free State	5
University of Port Elizabeth	4
University of Potchefstroom	1
University of Stellenbsoch	6
University of the Western Cape	30
University of Zululand	5
Vaal Technikon	3
Vista University	1
University of the Witwatersrand (WITS)	3
WTECH	1

Appendix B: Courses

University Courses	Minimum duration	No. of students	Technikon Courses	Minimum duration	No. of students
BA	3	2	ND Account	3	6
BA Law	3	1	ND Agr Mgt	3	2
BA Comm Law	3	1	ND Analytic Ch	3	1
B Comm	3	24	ND Biomed	3	2
B Cur	3	2	ND Build	3	1
B Ed	3	1	ND C Des	3	1
B Pharm	4	2	ND C+M Acc	3	3
B Social Work	4	5	ND CH Eng	3	4
B Sc	3	9	ND Civ Eng	3	5
B Sc (IT)	3	5	ND Comm Ed	3	1
B Sc (Diet)	4	1	ND Compute	3	1
B Sc (Educ)	3	1	ND Elec Eng	3	8
B Sc (Eng)	3	1	ND Environ	3	3
B Sc (Physi)	3	1	ND Fin Info	3	1
B Sc (QS)	4	1	ND Foodtec	3	2
B Soc Sci	3	2	ND Graphic	3	1
B Sport Sci	3	1	ND Human Res	3	3
BA (media)	3	1	ND Info Tec	3	4
<i>Dip Law</i>	3	1	ND Int Aud	3	5
LLB	4	10	ND Managemnt	3	4
MBCHB	6	1	ND Market	3	4
			ND Mech Eng	3	4
			ND Pub Admin	3	2
			ND Pub Rel	3	1
			ND Sm Bus	3	4
			ND Sports Adm	3	1
			ND Travel	3	6

Appendix C: Case Studies:

The following case studies are based on information about students from the 2002 cohort who are no longer at REAP¹³:

Phumeza¹⁴ is a twenty-five year old woman with one child. She lives in Zwelitsha in the Eastern Cape. Phumeza succeeded in registering for her first choice of study, a national diploma in travel management at the Eastern Cape Technikon. She left after one year because of the combined pressures of financial problems and having a baby. After more than a year of job seeking, she gained employment as an administrative clerk within the South African Police Service (SAPS), where she earns between R1 000 and R2 500 per month. Phumeza writes: "my job is not challenging, but it's okay, but next year I want to further my studies."

Nontobeko comes from Hertzogville in the Free State. She received REAP support in 2002 to embark on a national diploma in human resource management at the Technikon Free State (now Central University of Technology). She passed three and failed two of her first-year courses, didn't apply for financial aid at the institution in 2003 and stayed at home that year. Nontobeko stayed in touch with her student advisor and REAP decided to review her case, on condition that she applied for financial aid at the institution. She therefore returned to the programme in 2004, but her results did not warrant continued support and she failed to meet REAP's academic conditions by failing all her subjects in both semesters. She subsequently tried to get a learnership, but this has fallen through. Nontobeko indicates that she had been looking for a job for nine months at the time of responding to the tracking questionnaire, but lack of experience, formal qualifications, and distance from job opportunities made it difficult. She attached an essay entitled "A story of experience about failure" to her questionnaire, in which she argues that "achievers keep on achieving because they look at their failures as a disguised opportunity."

Ebrahim, 22, returned to Middelburg after completing a year of electrical engineering at Technikon Free State. Like Nontobeko, he did not apply to his institution for financial aid in 2003. At the time, REAP focused primarily on support to first-years. After more than a year of looking for a job, he became a tester of wool fleece at the Agricultural Research Council. It's a temporary post, but one that he finds "very interesting... I do the testing of the wool so that farmers can know what quality their wool is." He recommends agricultural studies to other young students because of the opportunities available in the sector.

George is studying towards a B Com (management accounting) at Stellenbosch University. He comes from De Doorns in the Boland region of the Western Cape. He was supported by REAP until his anticipated graduation in 2004. He did not pass, however, and missed the opportunity to reapply for REAP support. He considered completing his degree part-time at UNISA but says "my family persuaded me to complete it full-time because I couldn't find a job at that time. He returned to Stellenbosch accessed a NSFAS loan of R16 000 through the university's financial aid office. George writes about his accommodation, which necessitates travel by train to campus every day, "I feel it's an experience for me and could help me in the future." He expects to graduate at the end of this year.

¹³Captured from completed questionnaires in the parallel tracking study currently conducted by REAP and supplemented by information from the student advisors

¹⁴None of the names used in these case studies are the students' real names